

OPEN LETTERS.

Lincoln's Ancestors in Virginia.

THIS brief notice of the ancestors of Lincoln who lived in Virginia is designed to throw, if possible, some additional light upon the history of the fathers of that great man, and perhaps correct some errors of fact growing out of the unsettled — almost illiterate — condition of affairs during the period of time involved.

That the early ancestors of Lincoln lived in Berks county, Pennsylvania, and moved thence to Virginia, as Messrs. Nicolay and Hay state, there is no reason to doubt. It is confirmed by the statements of the President himself. It may be accepted, too, as correct that the great-grandfather of Lincoln, whose name was John Lincoln, lived in that county and State and emigrated from there to Virginia. The precise date of his settlement in Virginia has not as yet been definitely ascertained.

It is true, as stated in *THE CENTURY*, that the records belonging to the Lincoln family during their residence in Rockingham county, Virginia, were destroyed by the Federal army during the civil war, but fortunately there are yet in existence certain official and indisputably authenticated documents, only discovered upon a recent search, which the torch of war did not touch and which disclose some interesting information on these subjects. In the year 1768 that portion of the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, now contained within the county of Rockingham constituted a part of the county of Augusta, from which county Rockingham was detached and organized in 1777. Prior to this date — 1777 — all transfers of real estate in the country now comprising Rockingham county were recorded in the clerk's office of Augusta county at Staunton, the county seat. The records of this office disclose the fact that on the 16th day of August, 1768, there was recorded a deed from the heirs of Robert McKay to John Lincoln, conveying a tract of six hundred acres situate on Linvill's Creek in the county of Augusta, now in the county of Rockingham. This tract of six hundred acres was a portion of a very extensive body of land patented to McKay and others as early as 1739, and was doubtless regarded then, as it unquestionably is now, as among the finest tracts of land in the fertile Shenandoah Valley. The consideration that passed from John Lincoln to McKay's heirs as set forth in the deed is merely a nominal one, "the sum of five shillings, current money of Virginia." In view of this purchase of land in Virginia by John Lincoln, it may certainly be regarded as settled that he — the great-grandfather of the President — located in what now constitutes Rockingham county, Virginia, as early as 1768.

Messrs. Nicolay and Hay intimate in the Lincoln history, and Mr. Nicolay states in his article on Lincoln in the "Encyclopedia Britannica," that Abra-

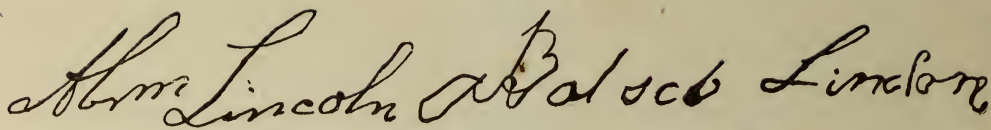
ham, Isaac, Jacob, Thomas, and John, sons of John Lincoln, were born in Virginia. Unless it can be shown that John Lincoln located in Virginia a considerable time prior to the year 1768, it may be fairly assumed that his sons just named were all born in Pennsylvania and accompanied their father to Virginia upon his settlement in that State. This idea receives corroboration from certain conveyances to his sons made by John Lincoln. On the 11th of August, 1773, only five years after the date of the conveyance from the McKays to John Lincoln, he with his wife, "Rebeckah R.," transferred to their son Isaac two hundred and fifteen acres of the original six-hundred-acre tract, and on the 17th day of August, 1773, they also conveyed to their son Abraham — the grandfather of the President — two hundred and ten acres of this same tract, each conveyance being made for a nominal consideration only, — "five shillings current money of Virginia."* It may be noted that the elder John Lincoln, as well as his sons, all spelt and wrote their name "Lincoln," and in no instance do these documents disclose any other method of spelling.

At what time did Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the President, remove from Virginia to Kentucky? Messrs. Nicolay and Hay fix the date as 1780. The date of the land warrants to Abraham Lincoln, the 4th of March, 1780, and the subsequent entries of the land in Kentucky thereunder certainly confirm the time of his leaving Virginia as being as early as 1780, but the statement by Messrs. Nicolay and Hay "that he took his wife and five children with him" at this time is not borne out by record evidence in Rockingham county. There is still in existence the original deed from Abraham Lincoln and Bersheba, † his wife, to one Michael Shanks, dated the 18th of February, 1780, whereby, "in consideration of the sum of five thousand pounds current money of Virginia in hand paid," they granted and conveyed to Shanks a tract of two hundred and fifty acres, consisting of the two hundred acres received from John Lincoln, his father, and another tract of about forty acres obtained from one Munsey. There can scarcely be any reasonable doubt that this was the sale of Abraham Lincoln's real estate preparatory to his emigration to Kentucky. The deed was recorded on the 17th of June, 1780, but without the privy examination of "Bersheba," his wife, attached to the transfer. Consequently, in order to remedy this defect in the conveyance, there was issued on the 8th of September, 1781, by the county court of Rockingham, a commission of privy examination of his wife "Bersheba," "she being unable to travel to our said county court of Rockingham to be privily examined apart from her husband whether she is willing to relinquish her right of dower in the land in the said deed mentioned, as the law in that case directs." This commission was executed by the commissioners named therein

* The rest of the original six hundred acres remained vested in John Lincoln until the date of his death in 1792, when it was conveyed by his executor to his son Jacob Lincoln. The executor's deed as well as the will of John Lincoln

were destroyed during the war by the burning of the records of the county.

† It appears from these documents that Lincoln's great-grandmother was named "Rebeckah" and his grandmother "Bersheba."



SIGNATURES OF THE GRANDPARENTS OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

on the 24th of September, 1781, returned to the county court, and recorded the same day; and the acknowledgment of "Bersheba Lincoln," grandmother of Abraham Lincoln, that she "had signed the said deed of her own free will, without any threats, force, or compulsion of her said husband, was complete," and with it, doubtless, passed all remaining material interest of the President's grandparents in Virginia. Lincoln himself states that his grandfather settled in Kentucky about 1782, and this privy examination certainly shows that his grandmother was still in Virginia as late as September 24, 1781.

If Abraham Lincoln the pioneer removed to Kentucky prior to this date—September, 1781—his wife did not accompany him, and it may be reasonably supposed, considering the difficulties and dangers attending travel at that time, that his wife and children did not migrate until the spring following. Nor is it improbable that Abraham Lincoln, having already visited Kentucky on a prospecting trip, and selected his new home, returned to Virginia to carry back with him his wife and children.

John T. Harris, Jr.

HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA.

The following letters from Lincoln on the subject of his family, which Mr. Lamon refers to in his life of Lincoln as having been destroyed during the war, have been since discovered, and for the first time are given to the public. They are addressed to David Lincoln, the son of Jacob Lincoln, a brother of Lincoln's grandfather, who remained in Virginia, and the originals are now owned and highly prized by Abraham Lincoln, a son of David Lincoln, a much-respected citizen of Rockingham county, Virginia, to whose courtesy we are indebted for their publication.

J. T. H., Jr.

WASHINGTON, March 24, 1848.

MR. DAVID LINCOLN.

DEAR SIR: Your very worthy representative, Governor McDowell, has given me your name and address, and as my father was born in Rockingham, from whence his father, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated to Kentucky about the year 1782, I have concluded to address you to ascertain whether we are not of the same family. I shall be much obliged, if you will write me, telling me whether you, in any way, know anything of my grandfather, what relation you are to him, and so on. Also if you know where your family came from, when they settled in Virginia, tracing them back as far as your knowledge extends.

Very respectfully,

A. LINCOLN.

WASHINGTON, April 2, 1848.

DEAR SIR: Last evening I was much gratified by receiving and reading your letter of the 30th of March. There is no longer any doubt that your uncle Abraham and my grandfather was the same man. His family did reside in Washington county, Kentucky, just as you say you found them in 1801 or 2. The oldest son, Uncle Mordecai, near twenty years ago removed from Kentucky to Hancock county, Illinois, where, within a year or two afterwards, he died, and where his surviving children now live. His two sons there now are Abraham

and Mordecai; and their post-office is "La Harp." Uncle Josiah, farther back than my recollection, went from Kentucky to Blue River in Indiana. I have not heard from him in a great many years, and whether he is still living I cannot say. My recollection of what I have heard is, that he has several daughters and only one son—Thomas. Their post-office is Corydon, Harrison county, Indiana.

My father, Thomas, is still living, in Coles county, Illinois, being in the seventy-first year of his age. His post-office is Charleston, Coles county, Illinois. I am his only child. I am now in my fortieth year; and I live in Springfield, Sangamon county, Illinois. This is the outline of my grandfather's family in the West.

I think my father has told me that grandfather had four brothers, Isaac, Jacob, John, and Thomas. Is that correct? and which of them was your father? Are any of them alive? I am quite sure that Isaac resided on Wataga, near a point where Virginia and Tennessee join; and that he has been dead more than twenty, perhaps thirty, years. Also, that Thomas removed to Kentucky, near Lexington, where he died a good while ago.

What was your grandfather's Christian name? Was he, or not, a Quaker? About what time did he emigrate from Berks county, Pa., to Virginia? Do you know anything of your family (or rather, I may now say, *our* family) farther back than your grandfather?

If it be not too much trouble to you, I shall be much pleased to hear from you again. Be assured I will call on you, should anything ever bring me near you. I shall give your respects to Governor McDowell, as you desire.

Very truly yours,

A. LINCOLN.

[Since the November number of THE CENTURY was printed, Messrs. Nicolay and Hay have become possessed of information which goes to show that John Lincoln, the President's great-grandfather, sold his property in Pennsylvania in 1748, and moved to Virginia about 1750.—EDITOR.]

Notes on Village Improvement.

THE first step in village improvement should be to promote its healthfulness. It is a very poor sort of improvement which occupies itself with laying out walks and smoothing door-yards and lawns, and planting trees and preparing flower-beds, while it leaves the air around the dwellings to be polluted by the noxious effluvia arising from a neighboring drain or from foul substances left upon the surface of the ground for lack of any proper provision for their disposal, or which leaves households to depend for the water which they use upon wells situated so near to barn-yards or cess-pools that they may be contaminated by them. It is a cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter, while within it may be full of all uncleanness.

A committee should be appointed, composed of energetic and capable persons who shall examine the entire village or town district, to see where the laws of health are infringed, and then to institute the proper correctives and safeguards, remembering that what endangers the health and life of one household threatens to some extent the health and life of the whole community. Having attended to what lie deeper than the surface, health and life itself, heed may then properly be given to those